

“A Whole New World.”  
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**Abstract:**

Our purpose in this study was to evaluate the differences in experiences between male and female transfer students. We were curious to know if men and women would experience a life transition such as transferring from one educational institution to another in different or similar ways, and if gender socialization seemed to play a role in this experience.

We interviewed ten subjects face-to-face, five male and five female students, who are currently juniors and transferred to St. Olaf with sophomore status. We felt this study was valuable not just for our own personal, vested interest, but also because life transitions generally are experiences that play a big part in our social lives both when we ourselves transition or when we encounter someone else who has.

Condensing our results into one paragraph, or even into a thirty-page paper, would be ignoring the fact that we have found that transferring schools is such a very personal, individual experience. Each of our subjects was able to talk at length not only about the facts of transferring, but also about the more intangible situations and feelings accompanying changing schools. We will do our very best in providing an understanding of the transfer experience both from our own transfer experiences and from the ideas shared with us from other transfer students.

**Setting/Community**

St. Olaf College is a co-educational private liberal arts college in Northfield, Minnesota. Northfield is the home of two private colleges, St. Olaf and Carleton College, and is renowned for its small town atmosphere. St. Olaf is a very beautiful and spacious college that sits on a hill, with large oak trees, emerald lawns in the spring and summer, and scenic views, which complement its beautiful educational buildings and residence halls. Roughly 3,000 undergraduate students attend St. Olaf College; there are no graduate studies of any kind.

St. Olaf is a residential college, meaning that over 90% of the student population lives on campus, whether in dormitories or honor houses. First-year

students have the option of living in Kittelsby, Hoyme, Kildahl, Mohn, or Ellingson halls, while upper-class students have the option of living in any of the upper-class dormitories, including Hilleboe, Ytterboe, Melby, Rand, Mohn, Thorson, or Larson Halls, or in one of the service based honor houses. First-year dorms are moderated by Junior Counselors, more commonly referred to as JCs. A primary function of being a JC is to develop and promote interaction and a sense of community among the residents. The upper-class dorms are moderated by Resident Assistants (RAs). The role of the RA is much more disciplinary, although they still strive to encourage community.

St. Olaf has many characteristics that make the College very distinct, such as The St. Olaf Choir, an elaborate Christmas Festival, study abroad, and an incredible network of Oles, whether they are alumni or current students. This community is strongly encouraged by students, alumni, faculty, and the administration, and each of these components takes great pride in the community to which they belong.

#### The Issue:

Literature discussing transferring schools focused primarily on the topics of transition, adjustment, and social environment. Throughout life a person goes through many transitions both physically and emotionally. People change homes, cities, friend, jobs, hair color, religious preference, etc. When transferring schools people not only relocate themselves from one educational institution to another, but also set themselves up for a series of transitions in the new place.

One transition the students must make is in understanding the new responsibilities and expectations of the institution demanded of them by the professors, administration, and the students. They may find that they have to make an effort to accommodate these new responsibilities or expectations, but also that there will be people that will meet them half way. They need to adjust to differing workloads, new living environments (both physical location as well as the people around them), and the bureaucracy of the institution. These expectations at St. Olaf are addressed during Week One, when transfers and transfer counselors gather together throughout the week to relate experiences and the various stages of transition they will go through (George 1993), and orient themselves to their new campus. We found that other schools have similar programs that are very focused on the students' adjustment into the campus life (Davies 1999, 2000).

Research shows that gender can have a significant affect on students' experiences. More women are transferring in reflection of more women attending college and more women choosing to go to highly selective schools (Jacobs 1996), such as St. Olaf. George Ritzer writes on gender inequality theories "both women and men will respond fairly easily and naturally to more egalitarian social structures and situations" (2000: 320). Further research discussed gender as an important variable in the adjustment period, retention rates, and success after transferring (Fredrickson 1998). In response to this we felt that gender would be an issue in the transfer experience.

Overall, through our research we hoped to more fully understand the stages individuals go through in developing their self-concept (Wood 2000). We learned through our literature why people transfer, what it does to self-concept, and what varying factors influence how people adjust. Barbara Townsend suggests to us that young people are becoming more mobile in their lives, thus increasing the likelihood of changing schools (2001). Literature discussed the adjustments that all students have to make when attending college such as social support, stress, self-efficacy, etc. and how these affect life satisfaction (Coffman 2002). Finally, we examined in the literature about what role social support networks play in transition experiences (Skahill 2002).

Overall, although the literature covered an array of varied topics and ideas it fueled our own ideas, thoughts, and questions regarding not only our own experiences but also that of our fellow transfers.

## Methodology

Each year approximately thirty to forty students transfer to St. Olaf from other educational institutions. We selected a group of individuals that came in with the same status in order to have a more focused sample of experiences. We decided to interview people who transferred to St. Olaf in the fall of 2001, came with sophomore standing, and are currently juniors. This was the most applicable age group since they have been here almost two complete years. They are neither new to the school, as newness can create positive feelings of excitement, nor are they graduating this year, which can also have adverse effects such as anxiousness to leave, and reluctance to leave, which can lead to glorification of the surrounding environment. This left a total of fifteen people, the interviewers included. We decided to look at gender as a factor, comparing the experiences of males and females transferring to St. Olaf. Considering that, we chose ten subjects, with equal representation of males and females. We had to remind our respondents via email to schedule an interview three or four

times. During this time, there were people who would respond and were more willing to interview, and these are the people who we eventually interviewed. The compiled data taken from these interviews we have compared with our own personal transfer experiences.

## Interviews

All of the interviews were relatively easy to schedule, as a majority of the subjects were eager to get together. Everybody we interviewed transferred to St. Olaf at the beginning of last school year. We also came in the fall of 2001, which made us acquaintances, at least, with everybody interviewed, creating a casual atmosphere. We decided to do the interviews together, as we both had a vested interest in the topic. Some of our classmates believed that two people interviewing would inhibit the interviewee from fully expressing their thoughts. Despite this hesitancy we felt that it would be valuable both personally for the interviewers, as well as to elicit the best possible responses if one person could wholly devote herself to listening. Each one of us had one interview that was a one-on-one due to scheduling constraints. After our solo interviews we agreed that a collaborative interview was more beneficial. Also, since we both knew everybody being interviewed we did not feel that there were intimidation factors that would otherwise exist. The interviews were held in public places. We met in Buntrock Commons, most commonly the Fireside Lounge, and then would move to a more intimate setting at the subjects' discretion. This was helpful in maintaining the boundaries between interviewer and subject so we were able to remain as objective as possible.

## Findings

We have split our findings into three categories: factors that influenced the initial decision to transfer, the transition experience itself, and reflections on currently being a St. Olaf student. Within these categories we found that the communities, academics, and locations of the previous schools all influenced the initial decision to transfer. The transferring of credits, initial dorm and roommate situations at St. Olaf, and organizations participated in were the factors considered in the transition experience. Reflections on being an Ole and on the differences between four-year students and transfer students were considered in what it means to be a St. Olaf transfer student. After each set of findings we have added personal anecdotes, which will be italicized.

## Why St. Olaf?

The reasons why people have transferred to St. Olaf are very individual and specific to the student interviewed. A feeling you get, the arts department, community, studying abroad, being a legacy, fleeing the past, faculty, reputation, alumni, size, location, and financial aid are all reasons cited for coming to St. Olaf. Commonalities are few, but one thing that some subjects have in common, is application to St. Olaf while still in high school. Four subjects out of ten applied to St. Olaf out of high school but decided to pursue other options. Although they do not call attending their previous college a mistake, it is clear that there is something special St. Olaf has that previous schools were lacking. They have now found that St. Olaf provides certain fundamental qualities that allow them to be satisfied in their present situation.

When I was looking at schools to transfer to, I looked at schools all over the country, I was looking to be as far away from Duluth, Minnesota as I could get. I even accepted an invitation to attend a school on the east coast. In the mean time, I visited some friends here at St. Olaf. My friend convinced me to sit in on a class and I reluctantly found that I could have everything that I wanted in a college in Minnesota. The classes were small, professors had relationships with the students, and students were engaged. Also, it had the community that I felt was lacking at my previous school. I visited 2 more times and I realized that St. Olaf was the place for me to be. ~Anna

I had applied to St. Olaf my freshmen year, so I had already been to the campus and known that it was a smaller, more accessible campus. When I went to visit it again in my transferring search, it just felt right. ~Deanna

## Community

We found that a strong influence in desiring to transfer was the community that students found themselves in at their previous schools, as well as the community they imagined St. Olaf to have. As elements of this idea of community, we identified four different reasons for wanting to transfer. As either negatives of their previous school, or perceived positives at St. Olaf we found that student bodies, extended communities, organizations, and the “feelings you get” to all be influences in wanting to transfer.

Individuals discussed the concept of “community” as something they desired and hoped to find within the student body of whatever school they were at. Some subjects attributed the lack of community at their previous school as a

result of the actual layout of the campus, or the fact that fellow students were just not people they were eager to develop community with. Marc stated blatantly that at his previous school, “the students sucked.” In a more in-depth statement, Thomas expressed that he did not feel that the students or overall community cared about him or his fellow classmates.

A couple of students also shared with us that the extended community of their previous institutions was not fulfilling what they desired. Extended community was articulated as alumni or the school’s administration, and again pertained to a bad experience at their previous school, or positive experiences had or hoped for within St. Olaf extended community. Betsy shared with us that she had randomly met some St. Olaf alumni that were eager to hear about what academic direction she was taking, and wanted to help her in any way possible to achieve those goals. After meeting them she felt that she would like to be a part of that community that produced these kinds of individuals. Carrie expressed that at her previous school the administration seemed unreachable, and she was looking for an extended community that was more personal. She felt that there would be a greater possibility for this at St. Olaf.

One interviewee also identified that there was just “a feeling that you get” when you are here at St. Olaf College. Ryan related a story to us about coming to visit one of his high school friends during the time of Christmas festival. He dreamily told us about first walking into Bunrock Commons, seeing the Christmas trees and all the lights and decorations. He told us about how he heard the Christmas bells, and how his thoughts wandered back to his school at the time, “I didn’t feel it had something special compared to St. Olaf. I knew I needed to get out,” he said.

Subjects also identified school organizations as a valuable experience that they wanted in order to have a more fulfilling college experience. Ellie stated that a main reason why she left her previous school was because they did not have the organizations she wanted to be a part of. She felt that organizations were a valuable way to develop a social life in school, and really desired to find an active college Republican group. She believes that organizations are valuable outlets in making friends with your similar passions and beliefs.

At the beginning of my sophomore year of college I decided to embark on a new collegiate journey and transfer to St. Olaf College. I transferred from the University of Minnesota-Duluth. Coming from a small town and a small high school I was accustomed to living in a close-knit, caring community. During my first year of college in Duluth, that was the farthest thing from my

experience. I was somewhere that didn't live up to my expectations of what college should be. First, the college was a large institution. I had huge lecture classes where I felt like merely a face in the crowd. I didn't have personal relationships with any of my professors. ~Anna

In concluding this discussion of the idea of community in a college experience we found that students are not just concerned with their own personal situations, but also with the intimate world around them. Collectively, in ideas of student body, extended community, organizations, and the overall feelings you get, our interviewees illustrated for us the value of social connections in a fulfilling college experience. In a variety of ways they all hoped to feel connected and cared for by fellow students as well as administration and alumni, and wanted to feel something special within the contexts of their college years.

### Location

The location of the previous school was a factor that heavily influenced the initial decision to transfer for six out of our ten subjects. Location was something that we suspected would be a factor in the transfer experience, so we specifically asked a question regarding the location of their previous college. However, during the interviews many respondents cited location as a factor before we raised the issue. Both Carrie and Tyler cited the location of their previous school as the main reason of transferring. Carrie initially attended school in New Brunswick, Canada, and felt that the Maritime Provinces were both too isolated and too far away from home. Also, the cultural differences between Canada and the United States were more extreme than she expected or desired for her college experience. Tyler said that he primarily wanted to leave the northwest part of the United States because it was both where he was raised and where he decided to attend college the first time. He needed a change, and he also wanted to get far away from that part of the country for personal reasons.

Two other subjects, Ryan and Ellie, both initially went to college in the Twin Cities, St. Paul and Minneapolis respectively. Although neither of them said that location was a primary reason for transferring, they said that the urban setting was among the factors that heavily influenced their decision. For both Ryan and Ellie the rural setting of St. Olaf was very appealing, and this was enhanced by the Twin Cities being easily accessible from Northfield. In comparison, one student said that her previous college in Morris, Minnesota was too rural, and one of the reasons for coming to St. Olaf was that there are

more entertainment and cultural options. In fact, the location of Northfield and St. Olaf was very appealing to many students who desired the small town community and atmosphere while still having the opportunity to experience the culture and the life of the city.

Duluth Minnesota is very close to my home, and there were many of my close friends who went to high school there. I didn't feel that I was in a situation where I could grow or change as a person, personally or academically. ~Anna

My previous school was in Milwaukee, WI, right downtown, and had about 7,000 undergrads, and 5,000 graduate students. A significant factor in leaving my first school was its' urban setting. A grad student was shot about a block from my dorm, and I could never go out at night by myself. My parents and I never had a phone conversation where sirens weren't blaring in the background. ~Deanna

## Academics

Some subjects cited academics as being a major reason for leaving his/her previous school. There are many different aspects of academia that can be the cause of an unfulfilling experience. In Stu's case, he was kicked out of his first college for academic reasons, encouraged to go to a community college, and then opted for a "restart program in pursuit of a degree." On the other end of the spectrum Betsy reported pulling off "perfect grades with minimal effort," and was extremely disappointed in her previous college's academic demands. Marc was frustrated with the professors who were not helpful and were often rude. The religious requirement at his school was twenty-four semester hours, which equals six religion classes at St. Olaf. Academics is a very significant part of the college experience, and it is not surprising that if these expectations are not fulfilled it will lead to discontentment. What is interesting is that only three subjects out of ten cited academics as being one of the reasons for transferring, considering that academics are portrayed as typically fundamental to a college education.

I was in an environment where many people were academically unmotivated. These attitudes were addictive to me, and in trying to become part of the crowd I found myself putting academics in last place yet still being very successful in terms of grades. ~Anna

I guess another factor was that I was attending a private institution, but TA's were teaching four of my five classes. I felt I wanted an even more intimate

classroom experience. ~Deanna

## Transferring Credits

Being able to retain credit for the work done at a previous college is an important factor in the transition process. Half of our subjects had a difficult time transferring credits, while the other half thought that the fusion of credits went smoothly. For those who had problems, their attitudes and experience were generally extremely negative while those with positive experiences were generally elated with the results.

Five of the ten subjects had trouble transferring credits. When we asked Marc about his experiences transferring credits he sarcastically chuckled and replied "They screwed me over here." Both Marc and Tyler were able to keep only half of their credits. Marc has been fighting it since he got here and he eventually gave up and will catch up with summer school. Stu also had severe problems bringing credits with him to St. Olaf and blamed the transferring of credits for his current junior status after five years of college.

On the other hand five of the ten subjects had a smooth transition of credits between institutions. Everybody in this category expressed satisfaction because either all of their credits transferred, or more credits than they had anticipated transferred. For both Carrie and Ryan transferring credits was a dream. Carrie had all of her credits transfer while Ryan got more credits than a typical first-year student would have. Ryan came with eleven credits and received upper level credit for introductory classes at his previous school.

Problems transferring credits caused students to attend summer school or carry an overload to make up for their alleged insufficient amount of course work. Losing semester hours due to changes between systems, and schools having different emphases on particular requirements also had extreme effects. For those who lost credits, there were different assumed reasons that particular credits didn't transfer. Tyler talks about majoring in music at his previous college and St. Olaf's hesitancy in accepting music classes from another school since St. Olaf is so musically acclaimed. Tyler also received credit for participating in choir at his previous school, where choir participation at St. Olaf does not grant credit. Academic performance at the previous school makes a large impact on the number of credits transferred because in Tyler's findings, St. Olaf only accepts courses with grades of A's or B's. St. Olaf also refuses to accept courses from a discipline that does not exist here. All of these factors influence the success of transferring credits. This process can be very indicative

of a positive or negative initial experience at St. Olaf. It has a huge effect on the ease of transferring, and how long the effects of transferring linger academically.

I didn't really have many problems transferring credits. I got seven classes out of eight transferred, but I don't know why my eighth class didn't transfer. It was an English literature elective emphasizing gothic literature. I didn't push for it to count. However, from going to a system where semester hours are counted instead of credits, I ended up being behind in credits and had to take summer school to make up. ~Anna

I did not have many complications transferring credits. I came in with nine credits, but there was one course they did not accept which at this point in time I cannot even recall. ~Deanna

### First Year Living Situation at St. Olaf

We have broken down living situation into two transitional factors, where one lives and whom he/she lives with. Subjects lived in the following upper-class dorms: Hilleboe, Larson, Ytterboe, Thorson and Rand. Eight of the interviewees felt that the dorm in which he/she lived made an impact on their experience in terms of making friends and the quality of the living facility. The remaining two students felt that their experiences would have been the same regardless of the residence hall they were assigned to.

Since there was a housing crunch at St. Olaf when the students first arrived on campus, two males, Marc and Stu, did not have a place to live initially. Marc claimed that he was only accepted to the college because he offered to live with a relative near the college. Both feel that living on campus had positive effects on their situations. Stu was later placed in Thorson, and felt that it had a very large impact on his transition. First of all, he was extremely glad not to be living in a first year dorm as a transfer student, where he would have felt isolated and out of place. Thorson was great for him both academically and socially, "Thorson had just the right amount of seriousness and the right amount of partying," Stu said. Marc, while he felt positively about living on campus, had mixed feelings about the specific dorm in which he lived. Marc was placed in Ytterboe and felt that it had a very large effect on his experience. He felt that Ytterboe was a fun building, promoting a lot of social interaction and it is where he met all of his friends, with the exception of the other transfer students.

Adversely, there are some disadvantages to Marc's situation. First of all, since Ytterboe is mainly a senior residence hall, all of the friends that he met were older than him, which gave him the feeling that his social life was in their hands. He also felt that the turnover rate at graduation was hard because all of his friends left. Laura and Carrie had specific remorse about the dorms in which they first lived. Laura lived in Larson and said that it was hard to meet people because the way in which the rooms are arranged. She felt it prohibited social interaction and made it harder to make friends. She did not make any friends as a result of her residence hall. Carrie lived in Hilleboe, and described her fellow residents as being quiet, very involved and busy on campus, and valuing their personal space. This type of atmosphere did not promote the formation of social relationships.

There are many factors behind the level of contentment with first year dorms, most involving social issues. The atmosphere of the dorm is very important, for example the contrasting social isolation of Hilleboe and the socially interactive environment of Ytterboe. Depending on which dorm the students were placed their experiences will be very different. The construction of the residence halls is also an important issue, for if the dorm is not set up to promote social activity it will be much harder for a new student to interact with and meet new people. Each dorm typically carries with it a reputation of what the atmosphere will be in that dorm, and an upper-class student usually has the choice of what type of atmosphere they choose to live in. The transfer situation is different, in that transfer students are usually not aware of these attached reputations, and thus cannot choose a dorm that will fulfill their expectations. However, these reputations do not seem to be strong enough to prohibit satisfaction since eight of the ten interviewed had a positive experience.

I first lived in Hilleboe. Hilleboe was an anti-social, quiet dorm, and it was very separated from the rest of campus. I feel that this had a strong influence on my experience here because the people who lived in Hilleboe didn't seem interested in meeting new people, so I didn't really meet any of my neighbors or make any connections in that way. ~Anna

Mohn; I guess I got so immersed in academics as soon as I got here that I didn't really get to know the dorm I lived in other than the girls on my floor. I remember hearing what sort of reputation it had, and not even knowing why it was known as a wilder dorm. I spent a lot of time in my room studying, or in the library. My experience with Mohn was not what people made the dorm out to be, but I was able to get to know the girls on my floor pretty well. I still say 'hi' to them on campus, but we don't spend free time together or anything.

~Deanna

## Roommates

Another important factor to consider in the transfer experience is how the transfer student related to his/her roommate. We found various experiences both good and bad among our subjects, and a gamut of reasons why they held the opinions they did. In our initial coding endeavors we believed to have found a factor that could be directly correlated with gender, but when we had accounted for our own particular roommate situations we came to find that gender was not necessarily a determining variable. In general we found that there were more subjects who did not have a successful relationship with their roommates than those who did. Those who did not have successful relationships were primarily females.

To begin with positive roommate situations, it seemed that although none of the transfers knew more than the basics about their roommates upon arriving to St. Olaf, they found that sharing a space with them bettered their time here. Thomas said that he lived with a senior who was very nice, but also “a big dork”. Interestingly, a girlfriend of one of Thomas’ high school friends had recommended the senior to request Thomas as a roommate. Thomas did not know him, but felt in the end he was very easy to room with. Stu felt that his first-year roommate was perfect for what he needed when he first got here. They related in that they both were “nocturnal, ‘manic-depressive’, and dealt with crunch time in similar ways”. He stated that his roommate “was really smart but not an asshole.” Very confidently, Ryan believed his roommate “was the best thing that happened to me in college, [because] everything worked out really well.” Echoing similar feelings, Marc said that it seemed as though he and his roommate had known each other forever, and felt very fortunate for this. “It was great,” he said.

Subjects also voiced some not-so-great roommate situations. Ellie initially got along great with her roommate until her roommate stopped talking to her for no apparent reason. She eventually moved to the floor she had been an RA for over interim. Tyler felt he and his roommates were definitely not compatible; he “thought they acted like alcoholics.” There were some more drastic situations as well. Carrie expressed she felt like a guest in her own room as her roommate had already drawn up a floor plan by the time she arrived on campus, and that although she herself admitted to having controlling tendencies her roommate was a “control freak”. Later on she came to find that her roommate equally disliked her, and had described Carrie as “a vulgar, bi-polar,

hard-core partier, psycho bitch". Carrie giggled as she told us about the situation.

One key factor in roommate struggles was difference in study habits. Becca lived with an international student whom she got along with great, but just could not adapt to her intense study habits. Becca said her roommate would wake up about 4 a.m., study, go to class, study, grab meals to go, and continue studying. She also told us the room had to be consistently quiet, which was frustrating. By the end of November the roommate had moved out, Becca stated, "we were very different." With similar frustrations but from the opposite angle, Laura said, "I am a serious student, my roommate was a slack student. I learned what the word 'sexiled' meant."

My first roommate situation was very brief. I talked to my roommate and although she was a nice person she made it clear to me that she was intended on getting an international student and was "stuck with a transfer." This made me nervous to start of with, although she went out of her way to come and meet me before I left for the Transfer camping trip and in no way made me feel unwelcome. She was only going to be on campus only first semester, so I knew that another roommate was on the way. A couple of weeks into the semester a transfer student across the hall had a vacancy in her room, so we moved in together and it was a wonderful experience. ~Anna

My roommate here first year changed and formed just about my entire experience here. She was expecting to have a roommate that she had chose, but then a month before classes began she heard she wasn't coming back to school. We spoke once on the phone, and I couldn't read her one way or the other. Turns out though that we couldn't have had a better situation. She was a quieter person, but incredibly kind and sweet, and very academically focused. Also, she was the connection to the friend group that I now live with. I feel so incredibly lucky! ~Deanna

In the end, we were again reminded that transferring is a very particular and personal experience. Although some of our subjects would agree that they had higher hopes of a roommate situation, they did not share all the particulars as to why they did not get along. In much the same way, positive roommate situations seemed to be greatly appreciated but worked out for different reasons.

Reflections...

Part of understanding the transfer experience is evaluating what students' feelings are about their present situations in light of how they view the past. We felt that valuable topics to investigate would be in regards to what they perceive as being an Ole, how their academic expectations have been met, continuing friendships with other transfer students, and the differences they see between four-year students and transfer students. It is only by time passing that understandings of our transition experiences evolve.

...of being an "Ole"

Subjects' perceptions of being an "Ole" varied from individual to individual. Some had pre-conceived notions as to what it meant, while others only now feel they are grasping what it means. Stu felt he knew of certain stereotypes the Ole community had which happened to all be things he was looking for; a largely Norwegian/Scandinavian, Lutheran campus where everyone sings, "I expected the beds to be shaped like music notes" he said. Marc knew of the meaning of being an Ole through his family, and knew that community was very important. He knew of the emphasis on international travel and of being a better person, which was reinforced once he got here.

Some transfers did not recall coming here knowing what an "Ole" was. Tyler was one who did not know, but now thinks in being an Ole there is great focus on school pride. He believes Carlton is to be seen as bad, and when you are here you are all about Olaf (at which time he gave us a little "Um, Ya, Ya" cheer). Laura thought there would be an elitist feel of money and status in the air. She now sees being an Ole as a diverse experience where there are many kinds of people within the community. Becca also did not know at first what kind of people these Oles were. She thought she might transfer and feel like there was no way out. But she also shared with us she likes it better than she thought she would, and that there is more diversity than she had expected, "it's never how you think it's going to be" she said.

Upon arriving I had a few generalizations about St. Olaf students. Coming from a town with a significant amount of Ole alumni I knew that Ole's had a great sense of school pride. I went on the transfer camping trip, and the first impressions that I had as an Ole were the President of the College and the Dean of Students came out to welcome us to the school and to wish us well on our trip. This amazed me, I knew who neither the President nor the dean of students was at UMD, and I definitely had never seen them. Among the first things that we learned on the canoe trip was UM YAYA. The pride and community were overwhelming and refreshing. Along with this, I had come to St. Olaf with expectations that it was a very conservative place and many of the people who

attended were very conservative. Although there is some truth in that, I find that it is much more liberal than I had previously thought. My first reactions to being an Ole stay the same, there is still a great sense of community and Ole pride. I feel that there is a definite sense of prestige that comes with being an Ole. ~Anna

I was not really aware that being an Ole was anything other than attending school here. I feel like it has taken me until now to even have a glimpse of what people mean when they say they are an Ole. I see it now as something that separates you. Not necessarily making you better than anyone else, but just different. People here have so many experiences overseas, as well as within the small Northfield community, and are just focused so much on things outside of their experience. To me being an Ole means not being satisfied with status quo, and making efforts to learn and live outside the box. ~Deanna

...on academics

Looking back at the transfer experience it is important to note whether or not expectations have been met. Respondents mentioned professors, course difficulty, and workload as influences on academic satisfaction. Only one subject expressed dissatisfaction with the academic realm. Her complaint was about a specific branch of academic life, the professors. Ellie expected that St. Olaf would be more stringent and that professors would be better. However, she is dissatisfied with the quality of professors on campus saying that the only two professors she liked were guest professors and as a result she appreciates the professors at her former school immensely. In comparison, Stu boasts, “St. Olaf definitely met and broke any expectations that I had.” Betsy, Marc and Laura expressed positive feelings about the challenges of academics stating that courses are more challenging at St. Olaf, with specific references to the increased workload. Marc agrees that courses were more difficult at St. Olaf and expressed his disbelief because his former school was ranked much higher than St. Olaf. In addition, Ryan is also happy with academics at St. Olaf. “Difficulty is not always quality. I expected to be getting my money’s worth. I gave up double digits [to attend St. Olaf]” he said. However, Ryan also says that he finds it hard to make a direct comparison between his former school and St. Olaf because the only place he has experienced upper level courses is at St. Olaf. This is an important point to be made because most of the other respondents are in a similar position as a result of the status of the group of people interviewed.

Academically, I didn’t really know what to expect from St. Olaf. I expected it

to be more challenging than UMD, but I expected many things to be the same, for example things such as class attendance. Upon arriving I was very overwhelmed. At my first school I could go to class only on test days and maintain good grades, and it was not the case here. I only took three classes so that I could have an adjustment period, which I think helped a lot. St. Olaf was very different in that it is a lot harder to skip class, the classes are much more interactive, and something very unexpected is that people do homework—a lot. Although it is more difficult than my last school, St. Olaf has been very positive for me academically. ~Anna

I honestly didn't even really consider academics that much. I knew that St. Olaf was a tough school to get into, but I felt my previous school was as well. In transferring though I just kind of went with my gut, academics were not a focus. Now that I am here I realize how academically demanding this school is, but it has not ruined my college experience. I find myself greatly challenged, but equally engaged in my coursework. ~Deanna

#### ...of relationships with other transfers

One more aspect of these reflections is on the present status these transfers have with fellow transfer students. Most acknowledged that at the very least they had made acquaintances during that first week they were all together. Collectively Marc, Tyler, and Stu said that their relationships with other transfers were very significant. Stu and Tyler said they live in a pod with all transfers, and Marc said transfer students make up his largest friendship base. Echoing these sentiments Betsy said that in comparison to the larger community, she knows all the transfer students while still not knowing everyone in her class. She felt she continues to get closer to some transfers. Laura as well said that her best friend is a girl she transferred in with.

Not everyone though has felt the need to maintain transfer connections. Ryan said that we've all gone our separate ways. During the day we've all got different stuff to do and just make other friends. We say 'hi' in passing, but have lost touch. Ellie said she only had friendships with "a few" other transfers, and Carrie explained that it takes another year to establish friendships, "you won't continue being friends with other transfers just because they are transfers."

I have definitely continued friendships with other transfer students. Last year, I was a very close friend with a couple of transfer students, and that is still the case. However, it is interesting because the transfer students who were close to

me last year have gone in separate directions over the summer, and I find myself being very close friends with different transfer students than last year, along with other people. ~Anna

I definitely have continuing friendships with other transfer students, and regardless of how often I see them, I always have a sense of connection with them. ~Deanna

...on the difference between four-year students and transfers

It is believed by our subjects that being a transfer student creates a college experience that differs from somebody who has stayed on one campus for his or her entire college career. Our respondents feel that at St. Olaf College there are vast differences between transfer students and four-year students. There are both negative and positive effects of transferring, and to many of our respondents they balance each other out. The differences listed are friendships, perspective, maturity and appreciation of St. Olaf College.

Friendship was cited as a large difference between the two groups. The ways in which transfers make friends is very different than first year students. Many first-year students share a bond built due to transitioning from high school to college. Stu feels that "These two groups are totally different. Freshmen coming here are all friends with each other and they live together. They come here straight from high school and they have their cheers, t-shirts, etc." he said. He also feels that there are certain social skills transfers have which first-years have not developed, specifically the ability to know how to meet college aged students and how to strike up conversations with them. Transfers have this advantage because they did it at their previous school. Marc feels that transfers lost a very important year at St. Olaf because he believes the first year is when students meet their life long friends. To many of our respondents, the reason behind the close bond of first year students is due to the social structure of the college, and the community. The first year corridors, screws, and JC's were all cited as being reasons for such a cohesive group. Ellie says that as a transfer, networking is essential to make friends and become involved in the community. "It is what you make it," she said.

Three of the subjects said that maturity upon entering St. Olaf made a large difference in the St. Olaf experience. Stu talks about transfers being more unreservedly in dealing with professors, administration, and different systems. Also, he feels that since transfers are more mature upon entering they don't feel the pressure, nor are they expected by others, to "conform to first year stuff" he

says. With this maturity comes a reward, according to Tyler. He appreciated that transfers had more power than first years upon arrival. Laura feels that she had a different way of reading people due to her experience. This aspect of being a transfer student has been positive to those who spoke of it.

One thing that eight of our ten respondents noted as a crucial difference between the two groups is a different perspective of St. Olaf. All eight talked favorably about their perspective. Laura says that after being at a different school she feels more connected to people of other backgrounds and as a result of her viewpoint she notices an Ole attitude of affluence. Betsy spoke about how people who have attended St. Olaf for all four years have an attitude that St. Olaf life is college life. She goes on to note the ways in which life at St. Olaf differ from life at other colleges.

Because of this “outside” perspective, respondents felt that they have an appreciation for St. Olaf that four-year students don’t necessarily have. This is the factor that Marc believes makes up for the lack of a first year. Ryan feels that he appreciates being at St. Olaf more than others, and doesn’t regret missing the first year, he sees it as being primarily symbolic. As Carrie describes it, “It takes me a second to realize that I wasn’t here first year and it is starting to feel like home.”

I believe that there are definitely differences between transfer students and four-year students. Although St. Olaf is a home to me, I do notice differences in my experience than if I would be here for four years. First of all, I think that the first year at St. Olaf is important in becoming an Ole. First year dorms are important for friendship connections. This school is much more “grade oriented” than my last school, and I believe that has a great deal to do with the solidarity of the first year. I appreciate not being here for four years, as I feel that I have a different perspective to offer. St. Olaf is very different from a lot of other colleges, and I feel that often many students think that all colleges are like St. Olaf, which is definitely not the case. I enjoy having experienced something else, it is positive in appreciating the college. ~Anna

I definitely feel there is a difference between four-year students and transfer students. It believe the first year hear carries a certain amount of weight in building friendships and experiences that are unique from any other year here. People frequently talk about the friends they had or still have from their first-year corridor, and the amazing times that they had. I am thankful though that I have been somewhere else, just so I know what things I really do value about my experience here at St. Olaf. ~Deanna

## What We Learned:

Our initial belief that gender would be a variable in how people experience transferring schools turned out to be irrelevant. It appeared to us that each person had very individual reasons for deciding to pursue attending another school, and that upon arrival their transitions were equally as personal. We found even the depth in which the subjects would elaborate on their experiences was not gender specific. There were men and women alike who were quite open about why they left their school, or why they chose St. Olaf, and there were equally divided gender responses that were not as divulging about what their experiences were like once they arrived to St. Olaf.

We also found feelings of present ‘labeling’ as a transfer to be nonexistent. Most students reflected that if anyone knew they were a transfer, it was because they had shared the information. Upon arrival people seemed to have wondered if they were a first year, but being the new face on campus eventually faded away.

Another inquiry we would have added to our questionnaire would be that of the subjects’ Week One experience. Here at St. Olaf there is a weeklong orientation before classes begin, which consists of activities for first-year college students, transfer students, and international students. The goal of this orientation is not only for the students to become familiar with the campus, but also to initiate social networks for students first arriving at St. Olaf. Information about the subjects’ experience during this time would have been valuable in more deeply understanding their transition experience. Some people we interviewed alluded to this time as being a positive influence in their transfer experience, and one of our subjects said that it was a direct influence in his confidence and ability in forming a group of friends.

In analyzing our questionnaire more fully we also would have removed the question pertaining to participation in extra-curricular’s. While we initially felt this would be a significant portion of transfer life, we found instead that people either chose not be involved right away, or they tried a variety of things to discover what activities were worth pursuing. We only found this after reviewing the interview results.

One other factor that we feel is important to consider in this specific life transition is that of the experiences of upper versus lower-class students. Because of our chosen study sample we came to realize that we had

completely disregarded the factor of age and amount of time spent in school in understanding the transfer experience. We feel that our scope may have been too narrow in coming to fully understand why people choose to transfer, and what their experience in transferring is like. We believe that there are transitions as well between years in school that influence people whether they are new to a school or not. It is also possible that transfer students who come in their sophomore year would again feel a transition when moving from lower to upper-class status.

Finally, we feel another factor to consider, which may seem more trivial but one we feel would be highly influential, is that of when we interviewed our subjects. More specifically we feel that the time of year both seasonally and academically (especially at St. Olaf due to drastic seasonal changes and high academic expectations) would have at the very least some influence on the subjects' responses. We did our interviews primarily when the weather was getting warmer and sunnier. We believe from our own personal experiences that this gives us a more positive outlook on any experience or situation we consider. We also interviewed at a time when most students would have been between mid-semester exams and the anticipation of a stressful end of the semester. We acknowledge that this may have been a factor outside of our control, but one in which could have influenced how the subjects viewed their experience.

Most significantly we learned the importance of not having expectations of how results will turn out, or what explanations there are for a particular experience. Often we have preconceived notions of why certain phenomena happen, or how they are experienced. In this study we learned that while it is natural to believe certain facts will influence people in a certain way, human subjects are unpredictable, and they may do or feel quite the opposite of what you expected. Our research can be valuable for those who are transitioning in understanding the depths of the experiences and changes they go through. Further research would be valuable with a narrowed focus group.